(b) if so, what are the main projects that would be undertaken;

(c) whether the work on these projects have started; and

(d) if so, whether the MTNL also plans to expand its GSM and CDMA mobiles in the two Metros of which Mumbai would get an additional four lakh lines of both services?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI ASHOK PRADHAN): (a) Sir, MTNL has plans to invest Rs. 2284 crore in 2003-04 for developing Telecom infrastructure, including CDMA Network.

(b) The main projects planned are as under;

* To provide 350K New Connections, by way of augmenting the net switching capacity by 400K including Fixed Line, Wireless in Local Loop (WLL) & Cellular Mobile Service.

* To provide new 50K Trunk Automatic Exchange (TAX) Tandem lines.

* Commissioning of 200 nos. Digital Line Concentrators (DLC).

* Replacement of 395K, E-10B switches.

* Commissioning of 20,000 Kms Optical Fibre Cable.

(c) and (d) Yes, Sir.

Expansion of MTNL network

2598. SHRI PREM CHAND GUPTA: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that Government have asked MTNL to explore opportunities that would enable to company to expand its network and improve its financial condition; and

(b) if so, what action has been taken by MTNL to achieve their objectives?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI ASHOK PRADHAN): (a) and (b) Sir, MTNL as Navratna Company is permitted to enter into Joint Ventures both in India and abroad. Following steps have been taken to expand its network and improve its financial condition :—

(i) MTNL has formed a joint venture company in the name of United Telecom Limited with Telecom Consultants India Limited (TCIL), Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited (VSNL) and Nepal Ventures (P) Ltd. (NVPL-a Nepalese Company). The company is operational since 10th October, 2001 for providing WLL based basic services in Nepal.

(ii) MTNL is in the process of getting feasibility and due diligence for a second Telecom operator in Mauritius.

(iii) MTNL also plans to operate in Kenya as a Second Telecom Operator.

(iv) MTNL has joined a consortium of TCIL India, alongwith a local partner in Malawi and has bid for buying equity stake during privatization process of Malawi Telecom Limited (MTL).

(v) MTNL has finalized interconnect agreement with Videsh Sanchar Nigam for the year 2003-04 for International Long Distance (ILD) and National Long Distance (NLD) Services.

Increase in Service tax for Prepaid card

2599. SHRIMATI AMBIKA SONI:
SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA:
SHRI GHULAM NABI AZAD :

Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state :

(a) whether there has been an increase in service tax for prepaid card by private cell phone operators;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether hikes in service tax by private cell operators are in accordance with TRAI; and

(d) if so, the details of hike in service tax in the last three years?